

## [Ghost Story]

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NEW YORK Forms to be Filled out for Each Interview

FORM A Circumstances of Interview

STATE NEW YORK

NAME OF WORKER DOROTHY WEST

ADDRESS NEW YORK CITY

DATE November 18, 1938

SUBJECT INTERVIEW WITH MRS. LAURA M. \* GHOST STORY

1. Date and time of interview

November 16 and 17, 1938. 3-5 on the 16th; 3-4 pm on the 17th.

2. Place of interview

Informant's home.

3. Name and address of informant

Mrs. Laura M. 300 West 114th Street

4. Name and address of person, if any, who put you in touch with informant.

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None. Known to interviewer.

5. Name and address of person, if any, accompanying you

None.

6. Description of room, house, surroundings, etc.

(see previous interview)

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FORM B Personal History of Informant

STATE NEW YORK

NAME OF WORKER DOROTHY WEST

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SUBJECT INTERVIEW WITH MRS. LAURA GHOST STORY

1. Ancestry

2. Place and date of birth

South Carolina, approximately 50 years ago

3. Family

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Lives apart from other relatives in city.

### 4. Places lived in, with dates

South Carolina over 30 years; Ohio for ten years; remainder of life spent in New York City.

### 5. Education, with dates

School, high and normal

### 6. Occupations and accomplishments, with dates

Housewife

### 7. Special skills and interests

### 8. Community and religious activities

Active member of the Presbyterian church.

### 9. Description of informant

Small, plump, fair woman.

### 10. Other Points gained in interview

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FORM C Text of Interview (Unedited)

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SUBJECT INTERVIEW WITH MRS LAURA M GHOST STORY

I went to see Mrs. Laura M., with whom I once roomed, and during a conversation that somehow got around to ghosts, I expressed the opinion that I hoped my luck would continue and that I would never see or hear anything that might be described as a ghost. Mrs. M. looked at me curiously, as if she might say something, on the subject, but apparently changed her mind. A neighbor who was visiting Mrs. M. and was on the verge of going, was persuaded by the sudden turn in the conversation to tell about a strange thing that had happened to her.

In the apartment in which she had lived before moving to her present address, Mrs. [md] had had a strange experience upon moving to her former address. She had placed her baby's play-pen in a certain corner in her living room. Soon after she had settled in the apartment, she noticed that the baby began to cry a lot; unnaturally, as if in terror. She would go/ to the play-pen, and none of the physical things which irritate a baby to the point of crying would be apparent. The baby was in good health and there was nothing to cause the constant terrified screaming. Mrs. [md] found it very difficult to understand the change in the baby's disposition as it had formerly been an even-tempered child. One day she mentioned the baby's behavior to her next-door neighbor. This friend listened, and then with some reluctance, asked where the baby's play-pen was. Mrs. [md] told her. The neighbor then explained that a baby's crib had stood in that 2 identical spot. The mother of this child had died, and the family had immediately moved away. Mrs. [md] had almost immediately moved in. The neighbor's explanation was that the dead woman, the baby's mother, was coming back to see her child, not knowing that it had been taken away, and

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that it was this strange spirit form that was frightening Mrs. [md]'s child. She advised Mrs. [md] to move her baby's play-pen to another corner of the room. She did and the baby did not cry anymore.

Mrs. [md] sat down again, and Mrs. M. looked at me in a strained way. Then she blurted out, "I've had a similar experience."

"Not long after we moved (she was then living with a brother) to 117th Street, I had a funny thing happen to me. It was a seven room apartment, and I had one of the rooms on the street fixed up as a sewing room. The sewing room, bathroom and kitchen were on one side of the hall, the storage room (a small room which she used for trunks and suitcases) and two bedrooms were on the other side. My living room was at the end of the hall and there was a bedroom off from that. Well, one day I was sitting in the sewing room when I heard a rustle in the hall. It sounded like the swish of a taffeta skirt. I looked up at the door and saw the figure of a woman go past. She had on a black taffeta dress and I didn't see any head. I called out, "Who's there?" Of course, nobody answered. I jumped up and looked down the hall. Just as the figure reached the door of the living room, it disappeared. I went in and looked around, but I didn't anything. I went back to the sewing room and picked up my work. I just shrugged my shoulders and said I was seeing things. Nothing else happened like that for a long time. Then one day, H[md] (a friend) was sitting in the sewing room with me, and I heard the rustle again. I looked up and saw the figure again. H[md] saw it, too. You know how she is, (Mrs. M. looked at me) and she said, "Good God, L.! What's that?" I laughed and said, "What's what?" She told me what she had seen. I told her that it was just her imagination, that she had seen a reflection from the street. She insisted that she had seen the headless figure of a woman. She was nervous for about ten minutes, then she quieted down, but she kept insisting that she had seen something. She said that it must have been somebody who had died in the house, and 3 was coming back to look for something. Well, I know that I had seen something, so I said to myself that

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it must have been a good spirit since it hadn't bothered me, so I didn't worry about it any more while I was in that house.

Then a woman who lived across the street came over and said, "You've stayed in this house longer than the last three families." I asked her what she meant, and she said that she had lived in the house when it was first opened to Negroes, but that she had lived in an upstairs apartment. The first family that had my old apartment in that house (it was on the [?] first floor) had stayed there a long time, and so had the people who had lived in there after that. Then she had moved downstairs into the apartment I then had.

She had put her bed in a certain place in one of the bedrooms and she felt like she was choking to death in the middle of the night. She didn't know what to do at first, but finally she had moved her bed to another position. After that she didn't have that choking sensation. But other little things happened, and she moved out.

She said that the next two families had moved in and stayed a month or two and had then moved out. I'd been in that apartment about a year and a half when she told me that. She asked me if I had had any experiences in that room. I told her that I hadn't heard my brother speak of anything funny happening. She just shook her head and said it was queer.

I used to hear sounds like steps very often. At first I thought it was my brother coming in from work. He didn't get in then until one-thirty, or two in the morning. I used to call out but there'd be no answer, so I just thought I was mistaken and I'd go back to sleep. One night in particular I remember hearing the steps very distinctly. I thought maybe he'd had an accident, so I got up and went to the door of my bedroom and called out. There wasn't a soul there, so I went back to bed.

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Then you remember (she turned to me) you used to hear little noises which you 4 thought were mice. Well, some of them were and some of them weren't. I didn't want to frighten you, so I just let you think that every sound you heard was a mouse scampering around."

(I remember hearing noises in the closet of the bedroom which I had, heavier than the sound a mouse makes, but I finally decided that it was Mrs. M. moving around in her bedroom next door.)

"When you used to ask me what I was doing up so late at night, (I heard the noises as late as three o'clock in the morning) I gave you some kind of answer because I was always asleep at the hour you mentioned. Before you moved up with me, I had the bedroom you had. I used to hear noises in that closet, too. One night the door kept swinging and I got up and shut it. The latch clicked and I got back in bed. Before I could get the cover up over me again, the door was open and swinging a little again. Now, I know that door latch was caught. But I went on to sleep. There wasn't anything I could do.

While I slept in that room, I had another experience. One night I got in bed and after awhile I felt something that felt like somebody trying to stand up under the bed. It was pushing right in the center of the bed. I reached up and turned the light on and looked under the bed. There wasn't a thing there, so I turned off the light, and in a little while the pushing stopped, and I went to sleep.

After you moved up there, I shifted the bedrooms. I took the room my brother had had, the room where the woman across the street had felt like she was choking in, and my brother took the next room. I didn't ever feel anything choking me, but I did feel that pushing again. Again I got up and turned on the light, but there wasn't anything there. I never felt it again.

Then once after you moved up, too, I was coming down the hall - you were in the bathroom - and it felt like somebody come along behind me and blew my hair up. It felt like a breeze that a human being makes, not like the wind. Like this - (she pursed her lips and

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blew as one blows up a balloon). I brushed my hair down but it wouldn't stay. (Mrs. M. has very light, thin hair). All of it in the 5 back stood straight out from my scalp. I kept brushing it down but it wouldn't stay. After I had brushed it down about a dozen times, it returned to normal. There wasn't any draft, and the front door wasn't open to let air blow down the hall. And what little air comes in the cracks wouldn't have been strong enough where I was standing in front of the living room almost to blow my hair up like that. I never believed in anything like ghosts or things like that. I don't know how I feel now except that I do think whatever it was meant no harm to me, so that's probably why I didn't get frightened."

I asked her if she moved because of those experiences.

"Goodness, no. After you moved, and my brother moved, I just didn't need a seven room flat."

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Mrs. M. has none of the traits of personality which one ordinarily expects to find in a person who relates personal experiences of the kind given in this interview. She is phlegmatic, unimaginative, practical, and apparently a materialist except for the variations imposed upon her by the set of events which she has described. She is a staunch church-goer, but shows and expresses no preoccupation with the supernatural. She has a high school education and has none of the attitudes toward the supernatural that is often found among ignorant and uneducated persons. No doubt her stoicism caused her to act as she did under the circumstances which she described. The following illustrates the stolidness of her nature:

Following a widespread discussion of the recent "invasion from Mars", she expressed herself as believing the behavior of those who were frightened as "stupid" and "ridiculous". "I didn't hear it," she said, "but if I had, I wouldn't have been frightened. And even if it had been true, I wouldn't have run out of the house. I would have just waited. If a catastrophe is coming, it's coming."

As was said in the previous interview with Mrs. M., her religious affiliation is with the Presbyterian Church.